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TWO EXPERIMENTAL APPROACHES TO FRESHMAN COMPOSITION--LECTURE-TUTORIAL AND TEAM TEACHING.

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THE RESULTS OF AN EXPERIMENT CONDUCTED AT THE CENTRAL MISSOURI STATE COLLEGE INDICATE THAT IN COMPARISON TO THE CLASSROOM LECTURE APPROACH TO COMPOSITION, THE LECTURE-TUTORIAL METHOD SAVES TIME AND RESULTS IN A SHARPER FOCUS OF SUBJECT MATTER AND A MORE INTENSE COMMUNICATION BETWEEN PUPIL AND TEACHER. A CLASS OF 25 STUDENTS WAS GIVEN ONE HOUR PER DAY, MONDAY THROUGH FRIDAY. ACCORDING TO THE INSTRUCTOR'S PLANS, CERTAIN DAYS WERE CHOSEN FOR LECTURES AND THE REST WERE USED FOR INDIVIDUAL CONFERENCES WITH EACH STUDENT. THE PARTICIPATING FACULTY APPROVED OF THE PROGRAM, AND AN ANONYMOUS QUESTIONNAIRE COMPLETED AT THE END OF THE TERM REVEALED THAT THE STUDENTS WERE OVERWHELMINGLY IN FAVOR OF IT. A LATER EXPANSION OF THE EXPERIMENT INVOLVED TEAM TEACHING AND THE SHARING OF ONE CLASSROOM BY TWO COMPOSITION SECTIONS. IN ANOTHER TEAM TEACHING PROJECT, FIVE SECTIONS OF FRESHMAN ENGLISH WERE GIVEN ONE HOUR PER DAY, MONDAY THROUGH FRIDAY, AND ALL FIVE SECTIONS MET TOGETHER ONCE A WEEK. EACH INSTRUCTOR ALSO MET ONCE A WEEK WITH HIS ENTIRE SECTION AND THE REST OF THE WEEK IN CONFERENCES WITH EACH OF HIS STUDENTS. MORE DETAILED CONCLUSIONS ABOUT THE SUCCESS OF THE TEAM TEACHING PROJECT WILL BE AVAILABLE BY 1970 AT THE CONCLUSION OF THE EXPERIMENT. (BN)

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TWO EXPERIMENTAL APPROACHES TO FRESHMAN COMPOSITION: LECTURE-TUTORIAL AND TEAM TEACHING

by
Rex S. Burns and Robert C. Jones

I

English departments in numerous schools are analyzing, critising, and even changing their freshman English programs. Lamenting the impossibility of having an "ideal" tutorial method of teaching writing, department chairmen and program directors turn to more economically feasible experiments in an attempt to find something more successful than the traditional classroom lecture. These experiments range from intimate gatherings around a television set to abolishing freshman English. At Central Missouri State College, which has about one-hundred sections of freshman English each quarter, two related experimental programs have been tried and found to be successful in quality and in cost; a lecture-tutorial system and a team-teaching system which makes use of generative transformational grammar.

The classroom lecture approach to composition was disliked for several reasons, one of which was the waste of time. Students, particularly those in four or five day a week lecture courses, feel pressed for time; more often than not, they come to one class after another in a mood of resigned boredom, rightly believing that only a

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small percentage of what they hear will help them individually on that particular theme due next Monday. Most teachers of freshman English will admit to feeling picked-on where time is concerned. Not only must they meet the requirements of a lecture syllabus to fill the class-room hours, but the students' themes must be taken home and graded, an unending process that takes up several evenings a week. And, if one holds the belief that the purpose of freshman English is to teach grammar and rhetoric, there is some irony in the fact that the most important part of the course--evaluating the students' writing--takes place outside the scheduled time and usually when the student is absent.

Having a large number of lecture hours during the term creates another type of problem for student and teacher. Wearying of repeating the same do's and don't's of composition for the slower members of the class, the teacher often finds escape by turning his lecture time into a jolly discussion of the Freudian interpretation of "Thanatopsis" or the fallacy of Riesman's aSsumptions; after all, such topics generate more excitement than the logical structure of Swift's "Modest Proposal" or the use of the semicolon. The subject matter of the course, in short, loses focus. Some grammar and rhetoric is taught, but a large portion of the classroom time becomes a survey course in literature or an introduction to social sciences.

Despite the classroom hours, despite the paper grading at home, the student and teacher still have not seen enough of each other. In order to evaluate the communication between lecturer and listener, and in order to give some personal slant to the course, an attempt is made to have at least one individual tutorial session with each student per quarter or

semester. During this session, and perhaps additionally at "office hours," the student gets individual help on his paper. It is in this extra session that the student receives the most practical and lasting instruction on composition--he is talking about his own specific problems and about his own particular theme in private with the instructor. Far less learning takes place in the lecture hour where many problems discussed are not so immediate and where the returned themes are vaguely remembered and somewhat stale.

But wasted time was not the only consideration which led to experimentation with the lecture-tutorial and the team-teaching systems. Many schools undergoing rapid population growth find classroom space, particularly at popular hours, very limited; one class, meeting three or four times a week, ties up the room all year long at that hour--even though the room was designed to seat a larger number of people. However, as many schools' computerized class cards reveal, little thought is given to changing the unit concept of one section--one room--one hour--one teacher each day. The effect on a school-wide course such as freshman composition means that many sections will be taught at unpopular hours or on a Tuesday-Thursday-Saturday schedule. Carefully arranged lecture-tutorial or team-teaching systems can double or quadruple the effective use of classroom space.

Closely related to the problem of a crowded campus is the much talked about loss of identity among students, especially newly arrived freshmen. Many an English teacher, his section size ranging from twenty to thirty-five students, has had the experience of being approached by graduating seniors

who asked to use him as a reference on an application form. One senior in search of recommendations explained that freshman English was the smallest class he had and was one of the few where the teacher knew his name. Tutoring sessions--individual contact between the pupil and instructor--can contribute to a sense of identity among students and to a greater feeling of accomplishment among teachers.

But tutoring sessions are expensive, and, when added to the lecture system, burdensome. Usually, this means that the idea of having a large amount of tutoring is given up in favor of the lecture; however, it is conceivable that the lectures rather than the tutoring sessions could be given up. This was tried, and it resulted in saving time and space as well as resulting in a sharper focus of subject matter and a more intense communication between pupil and teacher.

II

In the lecture-tutorial experiment, the twenty-five student class was given a block of time: one hour per day, Monday through Friday. At first, the time was used as the instructor desired. Some held ten hours of lecture for the first two weeks, then shifted to tutorial sessions exclusively for the rest of the quarter. Others held one or two hour lectures each week, devoting the remaining four or three hours to tutorial sessions. Later, in order to meet the economic goal of multiplying classroom space, the one or two lecture periods per week were made mandatory. It was found that, given only one section in the room at an hour, Monday and Friday were the best lecture days. The first served to go over one more time the theme due that week, and to introduce new material, and to

assign the topic for the following week. Friday was devoted to summarizing commonly shared errors on the themes of that week, to repeating the assignment for the following week, to answering questions, and to giving quizzes. When, as shall be explained in greater detail below, the classroom was shared by two sections, the best days for lecture were found to be Monday-Tuesday for Section A and Thursday-Friday for Section B. The content of those days' lectures was pretty much the same as on the Monday-Friday schedule; the benefit was that each week could be treated as a unit, an arrangement that gives many students and teachers the security of a regular schedule. The paring down of time spent in lecture meant that only the most necessary material could be covered--the criterion for "necessary" being how to make the student write better. Thus, the focus of the course was sharpened on grammar, mechanics, and effective presentation. It became, in short, a course quite pragmatically concerned with teaching composition.

But the quality of thought in a student's theme was not ignored. Quite the contrary, it is easier and more effective to tell a student that he has written stupidly when his peers are not gathered around him. The tutorial sessions enabled this kind of intense personal communication one time a week with every student in the class.

The tutorial sessions were carved from the remaining hours of lecture time. Again, there was some experimentation with the use of these hours. A few instructors collected the themes on Friday, graded them at home, and then discussed the papers with each student at his individual session. This method, while lessening the burden of lecturing, did not relieve the

teacher of grading papers at home every week. More effective, from the point of view of saving time and of making the interview more immediate, was the procedure of grading the student's paper while he sat at the teacher's side. That is, the student would show up at his conference time with his theme; the instructor would read it and dissect it in front of the student. Although the instructors participating in the experiment varied from graduate assistants to scarred veterans, after the first two or three times, none had any unease about bringing into the open that previously arcane and subjective process of theme grading. Indeed, some reported that having the student there not only saved the time of writing in the margins of the theme, but also made their eye sharper at spotting errors of content and grammar.

The sections had twenty-five students. The time alloted for tutorial sessions was generally three hours. Thus, only six or seven minutes could be spent with each student. Though much could be accomplished in that time, it was universally felt that a class size of twenty would make the tutorial sessions long enough. Many instructors, particularly early in the term before the students became used to the system, alloted an extra couple of hours per week for tutorial sessions, arranging them to suit the student's free time.

In arranging the time schedule for individual meetings, some teachers experimented with an appointment method in which better students had fewer meetings and worse students had more. Another variation was to have meetings at the student's volition--those who wanted to could come at the appointed hour; those who did not want to did not have to. The most effective method

of arranging appointments, however, was to have a rigid schedule with each student showing up at six minute intervals. This insured an equal amount of time for all, as well as giving the week a fixed time structure.

At the end of the term, the students were asked to fill out an anonymous questionnaire. The reaction to the program was overwhelmingly in favor of it, only three out of 230 choosing the lecture system over the lecture-tutorial system. The reasons for the majority's choice varied: sheer joy at not having to sit in class four or five times a week, the opportunity for better preparation of assignments, closer contact with the instructor, and clearer understanding of the instructor's evaluation of the paper. It is important to note that even those students who wrote that they expected to receive a "D" or an "F" in the course favored the program; they were the ones most likely to rejoice in getting out of class, but they also generally felt that the chance to see their paper graded in front of them contributed more to their understanding--and hopefully to a better grade next time--than having it graded out of their sight.

Each student was asked on the questionnaire to name at least two things he disliked about the lecture-tutorial system. Those students who favored the lecture system asked for the closer guidance of daily classroom attendance. From those who preferred the lecture-tutorial system, objections fell into two general categories: the need for additional help for which no time was available, and a fear of adult responsibilities. In the first category, the students wanted more time with the instructor. They felt that six minutes was too brief to assimilate all that was being told them about their theme, especially at the beginning of the quarter. Corollary to the desire for more time with the instructor was the wish to

have the opportunity to ask questions about problems which arise while working on a theme. This objection can be met by giving the theme topic two weeks ahead of time and then scheduling a discussion of the assignment a day or two before that theme is due. In the second category, the fear of adult responsibilities, students' objections varied from the inability to profitably use free time, to an intensification of any personality clash between instructor and pupil. A few students admitted to an initial disorientation in transferring to a class which met on the lecture-tutorial plan. However, despite this fear of freedom, most of the favorable respondents felt a sense of adventure in following a schedule so different from high school. Another aspect of the fear of the adult world was the student's unease at standing alone in front of his instructor. While grateful for the personal attention and the privacy of the tutorial session, it took the student a few meetings to overcome a sense of apprehension at having his work taken apart in front of him--and some never overcame it. However, this type of unease is not necessarily to the student's disadvantage as his ego-involvement in the theme contributes a major sense of importance to what would otherwise be a routine assignment. The result is a much more considered production on his behalf; for example, one student admitted that, by the middle of the quarter, he looked forward to the sessions because they were "like a chess game."

The faculty who participated in the program approved of it. Two principal reasons were given: the time saved in not having to take themes home to grade, and especially the satisfaction of seeing individual improvements in one's students. An important part of this last point was the knowledge that the student was paying attention during the tutorial

session rather than dozing in the back row of the lecture room. Conversely, the lecture sessions were made more valuable because of their scarcity. Time, in short, was not wasted. Major objections to the program were, first, the size of the class. While fifteen would be an ideal number, the more economically feasible section size is twenty--close to the AAUP recommended under-graduate ratio of 19:1. Secondly, some instructors felt that cutting down on section meetings resulted in little or no attention being paid to the outside reading assignments. Aside from a revision of the syllabus, this could be remedied by quizzes during section meetings or by basing the themes on the reading. Because of the nature of the program, most of the themes have to be written out of class. While this, in most cases, resulted in a more polished product, it also led to the third objection--plagiarism. This can be repressed in two ways: by intensive questioning of the student in the tutorial session, thereby making it more painful to defend a plagiarized paper than to do the work in the first place, and, more importantly, by assigning detailed topics difficult to plagiarize.

A later expansion of the lecture-tutorial experiment saw two sections, not necessarily of the same level of freshman composition, sharing the classroom during the week. Section A, for example, met in class on Monday and Tuesday, then held tutorial sessions in the instructor's office for the rest of the week. Section B met on Thursday and Friday as a class. On Wednesdays, the classroom was vacant for either instructor to use if he felt the need for an additional class meeting for examinations, in-class themes, etc. Thus, the use of the classroom was doubled. Often, the two instructors sharing the room would pool their materials and syllabuses, thus merging into the team-teaching system.

III

In the team-teaching experiment, five sections of freshman English were given a block of time: one hour per day, Monday through Friday. The first year of the experiment, all five sections met together once a week in a large lecture hall to hear a lecture by one of a team of three instructors. Each instructor also met once a week with his specific section or combined sections (one instructor had only one freshman English class that quarter) for a review-discussion session. In addition to these two regular meetings, each instructor held a third meeting--a weekly tutorial conference--with each student in his section or sections. These conferences were scheduled in the instructor's office and filled out the remaining three hours of the week allotted to the experiment. The instructor with only one section was able to see all twenty-five of his students during these three hour periods. Instructors with two sections saw one-half to one-third of their fifty students during the allotted three hours and completed their tutorials in three to six additional hours which they scheduled at periods that matched their students' free time.

The original team-teaching project (as distinct from the expansion of the lecture-tutorial experiment) focused upon generative-transformational grammar and, during the fall quarter, employed a rigid tagmemic sequence based upon the hierarchy of language forms (graphemes, morphemes, words, phrases, sentences, paragraphs, theme) to structure the presentation of material. During the winter quarter, the material was based on the process of tagmemic definition (negative contrast, positive accumulation, limitation of variability, arrangement of units in classes, arrangement of units in sequence, arrangement of units on a grid or network). In recognition of the fact that today's college student is visually oriented,

the instructors made extensive use of the overhead projector to present illustrations and examples.

With the exception of introductory and review lectures, the lectures each week were designed to introduce, illustrate, and explain a concept of language form or a procedure of composition. Students were given writing assignments which demanded that they analyze, imitate, or employ the concepts or procedures developed in the lectures. For example, during the fall, one of the lectures dealt with the concept of the grapheme, emphasizing the various kinds and uses of punctuation marks. The assignment based on this lecture required the student to analyze and evaluate the use of a specific type of punctuation mark in a student-written theme.

Each instructor used his section-meeting each week for a combination of purposes: clarification and elaboration of the assignment for the following week; screening of previous assignments to illustrate points of grammar and matters of rhetoric; class discussion. During the regularly scheduled tutorial conference, each student brought in his written assignment for that week to be read and corrected.

As in the previously discussed lecture-tutorial experiment, both students and instructors discovered that the deliberate truncation of time spent in lecture (without necessarily cutting down on the amount of significant material ordinarily presented) resulted in a sharper focus on the subject matter (grammar and mechanics in the fall, rhetorical forms and logic in the winter) and an increased attention to, greater understanding of, and more satisfactory attainment of the goals of each assignment.

The team-teaching experiment at CMS is still in process, so no conclusive evaluations can be cited. It is possible to present here one

partial finding of the evaluation procedures now being employed:

Students in experimental classes and students in five regular freshman English classes were given a proofreading quiz at the beginning of the fall quarter and a similar quiz as part of the final examination at the end of the quarter. The following is a breakdown of the results (score = number missed):

	First Quiz		Second Quiz	
Score	Experimental	Control	Experimental	Control
0-5	0	0	1	0
6-12	14	10	13	7
13-20	56	49	72	42
21-30	58	39	51	62
31-40	11	24	5	9
41-50	2	5	0	4

The results tend to support the conclusion that students in the experimental sections retained what they started out with (fourteen missed twelve or fewer on the first quiz; fourteen missed twelve or fewer on the second quiz) and some of them improved their performances from quiz one to quiz two (fifty-six missed 13-20 on the first quiz; seventy-two missed 13-20 on the second quiz).

The results also tend to support the conclusion that students in regular sessions did not retain what they started out with (ten missed twelve or fewer on the first quiz; seven missed twelve or fewer on the second quiz), and some of them deteriorated in performance from quiz one to quiz two (forty-nine missed 13-20 on quiz one; forty-two missed 13-20 on the second quiz). If similar results reappear on proofreading quizzes given to experimental classes and control classes for the full three years of the proposed experiment, then a more pointed conclusion might be formulated.

The present year, 1967-68, is the second year of the team-teaching experiment at Central Missouri State College. The team of teachers has been

increased from three to four to test how efficiently a larger group can cooperate in teaching freshman composition. More detailed conclusions about the success of the program will be possible when the data for all three years of the experiment have been analyzed.

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